1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

very few serious disputes arise in Abujhmar, where a
674 murder is extremely rare and due usually to some suspicion of
572 black magic. The Bison-horn Maria, on the other hand, is subject to sudden fits of blind rage, especially after he has been taking large quantities of his intoxicating gruel, *landa*, which is anathema to the Hill Marias. In that state he will seize any weapon that comes to hand, whether it be his wife's heavy rice pestle, a log of wood, an axe or a bow and arrow, and murder for the most trivial of reasons; the State Jail at Jagdalpur has always a high percentage of Bison-horn Marias doing time for homicide. He also is capable of nursing his revenge for a long time; a recent example was given by a strapping Bison-horn Maria from Palnar, who, after serving twelve years of a commuted death sentence, soon after his release took the first chance of picking a quarrel with a man whom he considered deliberately to have let him down by not giving evidence in his defence twelve years before, and battered his head in with a heavy bamboo stick. The Bison-horn Maria will in his fury declare an implacable enmity by stalking round his foe's house three times, either plucking straws from the thatch, or whistling the peculiar *su'i* whistle, or throwing some of his own pubic hairs at the house; and murder is the inevitable result. There were twenty-seven murder trials in Bastar between 1917 and 1923, and in eighteen of them the murderers were Bison-horn Marias, but only two of the murders were committed by Hill Marias. About half the Bison-horn Maria murders are committed in *landa* intoxication, and almost the same proportion in sudden fits of rage about nothing; for example, wives often are killed when the husband dislikes his food or it is not ready for him; one even lost her life for refusing to cook for her husband when he woke up hungry in the middle of the night. But there are on record Bison-horn Maria murders committed for all the ordinary sordid and criminal murder motives; the Bison-horn Maria is a man of far stronger feelings
[158] than the Hill Maria. The former actually runs amuck on occasion like the Malay; in two such cases the offender pleaded that he suffered from fits and ran amuck under the delusion, in the one case, of pursuit and, in the other, of possession by evil spirits and of the
628 imminence of a new rebellion. Cain indeed wrote in 1876 that 'blood revenge' had hardly died out in the Godavari valley, and was said to be 'in full exercise' in Bastar. The only apparent case of a hereditary vendetta of which I am aware occurred in Orcha, a Hill Maria village, where a grandfather and his son were murdered at long intervals for suspected witchcraft, while the grandson conveniently fell off a sago-palm tree as soon as he was old enough to claim the hereditary post of *pargana* headman.
692 There is a strong feeling everywhere of an eye for an eye and a tooth

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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live in some discomfort and under unnatural and strained conditions. These abnormal strains have resulted, more than once, in murder being committed. 791 [349]

Barse Chappe was a polygamous invalid. After suffering for some time from giddiness and trouble with his heart and eyes, he went to the village Siraha named Pocha for treatment. He became an 'in-patient' and was accommodated in a little hut. After Chappe had spent three days there, he felt better and went to Jagdalpur to give evidence in a police case. Here again he got ill and fell to the ground in a fit, and the Public Prosecutor was compelled to give him up. He returned to his own house, but when he reached it he had to spend the night outside on the verandah, as his wives told him that he would have to offer certain sacrifices in gratitude for his previous recovery before he could enter the house. The following day he again went to the Siraha for treatment and camped under a mango tree nearby. He was accompanied by his senior wife Sukhi and his little daughter Bode. From time to time his junior wife Chule, who remained in charge of the home, came to see him. After a week, one afternoon when Chule had brought food, Chappe asked both his wives to have intercourse with him in the hut. They refused saying that the place was too open, and that it was daytime and everyone would see them. Chappe got angry and beat both the women. 674x 791

A few days later, at about 5 o'clock in the evening, Chappe again asked his senior wife to have intercourse with him in the hut. But Bode and two women were sitting only a few paces away on the verandah of the Siraha's hut—whence the hut was in full view—again they were able to overhear Chappe's conversation. Sukhi again refused and told her husband that he ought to be ashamed of himself for suggesting such a thing in the hearing of three other women, especially when one of them was his own daughter.

At this Chappe lost his temper. He picked up a heavy bamboo stick and beat his wife so heavily that she died.

In his defence Chappe gave evidence of delusions. He denied that his reason for beating Sukhi was that she refused to have intercourse with him. He said that for the past week she had been giving him contaminated food. He had asked her not to cook in the Siraha's house where anybody might 674x 158

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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infect the food magically, but in a special place where only she herself would have access to it. This she refused to do.[1] She was also trying, he said, to have him out-casted for some moral offence. But the nature of this was not made clear in evidence.

The Court decided that Chappe was undoubtedly at the time of the murder a sick and unbalanced person. Although on that very day every able-bodied man in the village had gone out on a ceremonial hunt, Chappe did not feel well enough to do so, a clear sign that he considered himself in a serious condition. It is probable that a number of factors combined to bring about the tragedy. The very fact of being unable to attend the great occasion of the hunt must have been depressing. His wife had refused him access to her for several days. It is more than likely that he attributed his illness to someone's tampering with his food. At last the accumulated frustration and anxiety exploded within him, and murder was the result.

VI

MAGIC AND SUICIDE

In some cases, the torment of disease, the fear of the sinister and hostile magic causing it, and the failure of the magicians to effect a cure, led—not to the murder of the sorcerer or of the doctor—but to the suicide of the patient. The reason why all this misery resulted in suicide rather than murder is generally evident: the suicides were so wretched and so weak that it was impossible for them either to protect themselves against their supernormal enemies or to revenge themselves upon the human representatives of an unhappy fate.

For example, Markami Hunga suffered from yaws. She was old and covered with ulcers, unable to eat for pain and misery. One night, when all were asleep, she hanged herself from a rafter of her house.

Atami Kosa, a Maria of Poyali, had a septic ulcer on his left calf. Sori Hirma of Korra got very drunk at a harvest festival and dislocated his hip. For eighteen months he lay

[1] A similar delusion drove a Dhurwa of Darbha to commit suicide in 1939. He believed that his wife was poisoning his food, and he used to wait till she went to work in the fields when he would stealthily go into the house and get what food he could.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CRIMINAL LUNACY

CRIMINAL lunacy is not a serious problem in Bastar.[1] During the 22 years from 1919 to 1941, only 8 criminal lunatics were sent to the Mental Hospital at Nagpur. Two of the 8 were released cured, and 6 remained. More recently from 1935 to 1941, 17 persons were examined for insanity in the jail at Jagdalpur. Five of these, all murderers, were sent to Nagpur; five were found to be falsely pleading insanity and were convicted of violent crime; one was found to have committed a murder while insane, but was released as cured in 1937. The others were sent in for observation as harmless lunatics under the provisions of the Lunacy Act.

Of the 6 criminal lunatics sent to Nagpur, only 2 were Bison-horn Maria. But in 2 other cases Bison-horn Maria, who were convicted of culpable homicide not amounting to murder under Section 304, showed marked psychotic characteristics.

Marvi Bhima was a melancholic and murdered his wife in a fit of manic-depressive insanity. For two days before the tragedy he had behaved very strangely, walking in and out of the house and going round and round it; and it was actually while the relatives were calling the village elders to deal with the matter that he went into his house and stabbed his younger wife Kondi in the stomach with an arrow. After stabbing her he tried to pull the arrow out, but finding this difficult he pushed it right through her body and removed it from the back. In the meantime the village elders were on the way to the house, and when they got there they saw Bhima wandering about with a bow and arrow in his hand. They sent the unfortunate woman to the police station where she expired while making a dying declaration. No one dared to go near Bhima. But the next morning he went into a neighbour's house and they hastily

[1] It is often said that mental disorders are very rare among primitive people. This has been questioned, but little evidence has yet been accumulated. See E. Winston, 'The Alleged Lack of Mental Diseases among Primitive Groups', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. XXXVI (New Series, 1934), pp. 234 ff.

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[p.167]

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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Bison Horn Maria

closed the door and bolted it from outside. When the headman got there, he found Bhima hiding inside a large bamboo bin used for storing grain. The villagers kept him locked up until the police came and took him away.

Before the Court Bhima admitted stabbing his wife, but declared that he did not properly remember why he did so. Everybody testified to the fact that he had been very fond of Kondi and had always treated her well, though for the whole year his behaviour had been strange. After the murder he showed no sign of realizing what he had done, and during his trial he wept not because he had killed his wife, but because he feared 'that in his absence his cattle were being distributed like fowls'. He tried to escape from the Court two or three times during the trial, for he was filled with fear that he would be thrown into a pit, and begged the Judge that he might be hanged or given any imprisonment rather than that. The medical evidence was that Bhima was suffering from melancholia. He was acquitted of the charge of murder, but was detained under Section 471 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

'The periodic mental disorders of epilepsy', says Sullivan, 'are divisible, according to their relation to the characteristic paroxysms, into those preceding the fit, or pre-epileptic disorders, usually in the direction of morbid irritability, those following the fit—post-epileptic dream states or maniacal outbursts of longer or shorter duration—and those occurring in lieu of a fit, or possibly after a very slight and unobserved attack of petit mal. Criminal conduct, and particularly acts of homicidal violence—for homicide is par excellence the crime of the epileptic—may occur in connection with any of these disordered conditions. Its most frequent and characteristic form is the homicide committed in the phase of obscured consciousness which may follow or replace a fit or an attack of epileptic vertigo'.[1]

Hemla Chewa was an epileptic, and his left hand was a fingerless stump. On 18 January 1922, as he was going through the jungle near Hirana, he saw a Halba boy about sixteen years old cutting fire-wood. He had never seen the boy before, and there was no suggestion that he had any relations with him. In the Court he produced a story of

[1] Sullivan, op. cit., p. 133.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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being chased through the forest by three men and said that as he was running away he met the boy and seized his axe and killed him with it. Later the same evening he assaulted and injured a woman with his axe, and hit her nephew when he ran to her assistance. Chewa was tied up by the villagers but escaped during the night, and went to his uncle's house in the same village. The next morning he was again caught and taken to the police. In the Court he showed complete indifference to his trial, and talked throughout in a low tone. He was acquitted of murder, but was detained in jail as a lunatic.

Another epileptic who exhibited the characteristic signs of obscured consciousness and amnesia was an elderly man named Khotlu who killed his wife Mase on the evening of 12 December 1920 at Kawargaon. For a year before the tragedy he had been getting attacks every Sunday. He used to shiver uncontrolably, froth at the mouth, suffer violent convulsions and fall to the ground unconscious for two or three hours. At such times he had the delusion that a rebellion was about to take place and he would call on everyone to run away. Sometimes he himself armed with a stick would run into the jungle. On two occasions he had to be tied up, and was taken first to Torwa and then to Pondum to be treated by medicine-men.

Khotlu's wife Mase was nearly as old as himself, and had borne him ten children. They were apparently on the best of terms. But on the day of the tragedy, which was a Sunday, when they went out with their little boy to cut the kosra crop in their fields, Khotlu fell down in a fit. After lying unconscious for some hours he got up and shouted 'Run, run, the Bhumkal (Rebellion) is coming'. He told his wife to go home at once. But she said that their work was not finished and she would first pick some leaves and then come. Khotlu accused her of being in love with someone whom she wanted to meet in the forest. At that she agreed to go with him. He began to push her along and as she was walking home before him, he shot her with an arrow from behind.

The woman somehow reached the village, and died three days later. Khotlu stayed out in the fields and in the evening came and sat in his house. When he was asked the

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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following day where his wife was, he said she had gone to fetch water. Presently he pointed at something and said that it was his wife coming. When he was taken to see the dying woman, at first he declared that she was not his wife at all, then later insisted that he had no recollection of the incident.

The case of Poriami Kosa is one in which we approach very near to the boundaries of insanity, although the Court considered that he was sufficiently responsible and sentenced him to seven years' imprisonment. He was a man who was regarded as almost imbecile by his fellow Maria. He was incapable of ploughing his fields or of buying things in the bazaar. His wife seems to have treated him as a grown-up child. He suffered from some form of paralysis. On the day of the murder, shortly before sunset, when 'the sun was only three bamboos above the horizon', Kosa asked his wife to lie with him. But she refused and abused him, taunting him with his illness and saying that he would never get better. He then attempted to have congress with her forcibly, and she resisted. In the struggle her wooden combs and cloth fell to the ground, and Kosa full of rage stabbed her with a small pointed knife on the face and neck. She ran for about forty paces and fell dead to the ground.

Kawasi Chamru had a curious fit of madness which lasted several days. On the first day he wandered about the jungle. On the next he climbed up a tree and sat there all day. On the third day he killed two of his bullocks and rubbed their blood on his body. Nothing then happened for several years. But shortly before his tragedy he again began to act strangely. He had always been on good terms with his wife. But now he developed delusions that she was unfaithful to him. One day he suddenly began to beat her. Holding her by the tuft of her hair, he struck her three times on the head with a heavy bit of wood from a plough. She fell down and Chamru went on beating her till she died. Then he dragged the body into the house and, pulling a handful of grass from the roof, lit it and set fire to the building. Everything there, all the clothes, grain and the dead body, were destroyed. Chamru took a bamboo pole in his hand and sat under a mango tree in the jungle where he remained until he was arrested.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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It is possible that in this case some important evidence was suppressed by the witnesses, for there was a suggestion that the murdered woman had committed incest with her brother. The fear of excommunication and fines would be sufficiently strong to induce everyone to keep quiet about this. On the other hand, it is equally possible that the suspicion of his wife's infidelity was a delusion of Chamru's disordered mind.

Other Maria have been content to take their own way out of the world, when the psychotic disturbance became too strong for them. Many different symptoms are recorded as preceding such suicides. Baiha Ganga, for some days before his death, refused to eat and when people approached him attacked them with his stick. Bongi Maria was subject to periodic attacks of insanity; he tried to kill himself three times before he finally succeeded. Others displayed a marked narcissistic attitude, wandering aimlessly in the jungle, refusing to talk or work; such were Saradu, a northern Muria, who used to wander naked, Nari Maria, Pakli, a little girl about ten years old, and Marvi Mundi, a woman who had suffered since childhood from attacks during which she refused to eat and wandered about aimlessly, neglecting the dozen children she had borne.

There is finally the strange and sombre case of Markami Hirme, mother of four children and about to bear a fifth. In her pre-pubertal period she had been subject to epileptic fits, but was treated by the local Siraha, and was believed cured. On 22 October 1935, at her home at Gonderas, the epilepsy recurred, and she became 'strange in her behaviour'. She was in the eighth month of pregnancy. Two days later, when her husband was out watching the crops, and her eldest daughter had gone for water, she hanged herself from a rafter of the house in the presence of her three little children.

Now such a death is the most dangerous in the world. The woman who dies in pregnancy or childbirth is known throughout India as the Churelin or Churin; in Bastar she is often called the Ondar Muttai, the Old Bee Woman, who attacks men with the fury of a swarm of bees. Hirme's husband and the village elders seem to have been unable to decide what to do. Not one of them dared to touch the

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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corpse, and it remained hanging for two days in the house. Then, so the villagers declare, the foetus of the unborn child automatically discharged itself from the womb. By this time the necessary ceremonies of protection had been performed, and the body was cut down.